

Turning the Tide

Occupy Eugene (OE) celebrated its first anniversary Oct. 15 and began its second year of activism. This milestone offers an opportunity to look back to where Occupy has been, and forward to where the movement is going, as well as invite all of you to join in that journey.

The formation of Occupy Wall Street — and subsequently of OE — was a response to the poverty, homelessness, and turmoil that has resulted from the growing inequality between the decreasing number of “haves” and the increasing number of “have-nots” in the world. From the very start, the intent of Occupy was to redress the inequities in social and economic conditions brought about by a lack of effective regulation of financial institutions.

A good example of OE’s activism is the house it has occupied, literally, in downtown Eugene. The home in foreclosure was neglected, falling into disrepair and increasingly being vandalized before Occupy stepped in. This house symbolizes many of the major problems of our times: bank foreclosures, questionable lending practices, and an entire system that privileges big business and corporations over the needs of its citizens.

Perhaps this attitude of privileging the elite is best exemplified by the Supreme Court’s decision that corporations are “people.” An error in that decision is that people are human beings, living creatures who depend on each other for survival and happiness, while corporations are abstract entities with far different needs and objectives. One of the goals of OE is to continue to work on turning the tide, helping to guide our political and economic system to be more responsive to the real needs of real human beings.

In fundamental ways, the foreclosure dilemma is the result of another phenomenon of our times: the working poor, those people who are employed but not earning enough to put food on the table and a safe roof over their heads. The working poor often need to work two or three part-time jobs and are in constant danger of losing what they do have. The number of working poor is growing for several reasons. Wages are stagnant. Many corporations are cutting staff and either outsourcing jobs or employing workers part-time to avoid providing basic benefits such as health insurance. The working poor are often just an economic rung above the also increasing numbers of homeless, many of whom are veterans suffering the after-effects of our various wars and runaway youth who prefer the streets to unbearable living conditions at home.

We celebrate Oct. 15 as Day One of Occupy Eugene because that was the day that over 2,000 Eugeneans from all walks of life marched together in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street calling for accountability from our government and financial institutions. Since that day we have held many demonstrations, as well as Occupy protest sites.

We don’t limit ourselves to demonstrations. We strive to live by Gandhi’s injunction: Be the change you want to see. And in that spirit, we work toward the abolition of corporate personhood that corrupts our electoral process. We produce TV and radio shows that are broadcast locally, as well as podcasts to provide an alternative perspective of social, economic and political developments. On a more local level, we produce a bi-monthly newsletter, *The Eugene Occupier*, distributed around town. In addition, every Sunday from 1 to 5 pm, Occupy medical sets up its tent in the Park Blocks. The drop-in clinic does not stand alone; we also offer free haircuts, teeth cleaning and periodically tooth extractions in conjunction with St. Vincent de Paul. All of these services are provided free of charge.

None of this would be possible without community support. So we would like to thank everyone who at any time and for whatever reason has contributed to the movement by participating in events, in day-to-day committee work, joining us in demonstrations, contributing ideas, food, clothing, books, medical supplies, articles and poems for the newsletter, donating money, covering our events in the media, and the list goes on. Your support is the ground we stand on; the ground we occupy in body and spirit. ■

Catherine Siskron is an educator and member of the OE Newsletter Team. She has been a peace and social justice activist most of her adult life.



would be repaid from property taxes at a rate of \$0.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value, or about \$127 per year for the average homeowner. The current bond measure, passed in 2008, has funded all of its proposed projects, but there are still many miles of rebuilding and maintenance needed.

Measure 20-209 seeks approval of \$49.5 million in general obligation bonds to update educational materials, improve student safety and repair and construct facilities for Bethel School District. Two schools built in the 1950s would be replaced; funds would also provide safety upgrades, building repairs, updated textbooks and computers, and cost-efficient energy saving heating and ventilation improvements. The proposal maintains the current tax rate of \$1.25 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Both measures provide for citizen oversight and annual audits of expenditures. Both will create infrastructure jobs as well as improving the local quality of life. The League urges a “yes” vote on local Measures 20-197 and 20-209.

*Pat Hocken and Kappy Eaton
Action co-chairs, LWV of Lane County*

COAL BAD FOR TAX BASE

I just had the privilege of attending a Lane County Commissioners meeting that was held in Florence Oct. 16. The commissioners had published, in both print and radio media, that they would be coming to Florence for the express purpose of receiving public comment on the Port of Coos Bay’s proposal to bring large scale export of Montana Coal to various Asian markets. This proposal would include Lane County’s support for a “beefed up” heavy-duty industrial rail line that would accommodate this export, even though the coal would be transported through Lane County without the simultaneous provision of jobs for Lane County residents or the review of environmental and public safety concerns.

Amazingly, the chairman opened the meeting with (and this is a direct quote): “The Port of Coos Bay called me this morning and asked us to ‘pull’ their request for our resolution of support. Basically, they don’t have a project yet. Everyone jumped the gun on this.”

It is a well-known fact that property adjacent to industrial railways generates significantly reduced property tax revenues as the industrial impact increases over time. An enhanced heavy-duty industrial railroad steaming through Lane County will reduce property values and adversely impact our ability to deliver critical public safety. Are we prepared to absorb the further erosion of our property tax base that will inevitably accrue as a result of our support of this runaway railroad project?

*Mary D. Stephens
Florence*

OUR SICK CITY

If sending the flag from a homeless person’s father’s coffin to our landfill doesn’t break a conservative’s patriotic heart, what the hell will? [See letters, 10/11.]

Citizens with no place to go have to hide from cops. When found they lose their bedding, belongings and humble shelter

with 30-degree nights. Our city has gotten to be sick and evil! A year of talking to the city about compassion and shelter was a waste of my time.

It is time now for lawsuits and more demonstrations. The city rules have provoked this, and will spend more for police overtime. I’m frustrated, angry, and heart-broken at the injustice we call “our” government.

*Jerry Smith,
MSW, retired
Eugene*

AGENT OF REPRESSION

This past week we have seen a third young person from the Pacific Northwest sent to prison for refusing to provide federal grand jury testimony regarding activists in the region. Leah-Lynn Plante, Katherine Olejnik and Matthew Duran have all been imprisoned indefinitely for remaining silent.

It seems that it has become common practice to give immunity to people called before grand juries to force them to testify against others, frequently surrounding issues relating to political activity. It’s happened to animal rights groups, the environmental movement, and now the focus seems to be shifting towards the anarchist community.

When a legal tool such as the grand jury seems to frequently be twisted to become a tool of political repression, it’s time to rethink its purpose in our society. The U.S. is the only country in the world that still uses the grand jury system. It’s time to refuse to engage with it.

I admire the strength of activists like Leah, Katherine and Matthew who have taken a stand against grand juries, resulting in a huge limitation on their freedom. This is because they know that if we all resist grand juries like they have, eventually it will become a defunct agent of political repression.

*Lilia Letsch
Glenwood*

EVERYBODY WINS

I am writing in response to the Sept. 26 article “Campers for County Park Security.” The Lane County Parks Division is doing something beneficial for the community. Using homeless people with RVs or campers as hosts for park security is a win-win solution for the Parks Division and for the hosts.

People with RVs are not legally allowed to sleep in their vehicle on the streets. Parks suffer from vandalism during the winter. The mere presence of a host will decrease crime while providing some homeless individuals a safe place to sleep in exchange for their much needed service.

I applaud Keith Heath of St. Vincent for running this program. He created an effective solution for helping homeless people versus the permanent Occupy camp proposed last fall. Occupy Eugene’s camp, which was a haven for the homeless, dealt with theft, fight and even a death from a heroin overdose. Why would anyone want to relive that? I am delighted that something proactive is going on in the community.

*Wren Facaros
Eugene*